

Priorities for the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Transport Focus is the independent consumer watchdog representing the interests of rail users throughout Great Britain; bus, coach and tram users across England, outside London; and users of the Strategic Road Network in England. With a strong emphasis on evidence-based campaigning and research, we ensure that we know what is happening on the ground.
- 1.2 Transport Focus welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the priority setting process for the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee during the Fifth Assembly.

2. Priority areas

- 2.1 We would like to raise a number of priority areas for consideration, which focus on outputs for passengers.

2.2 Wales and Borders rail franchise

Scrutiny of what is being purchased on their behalf will be important to passengers, who currently perceive no involvement in the process. A new franchise contract must be based on well-evidenced projections of passenger demand and ensure there are mechanisms within it to respond to changes. The key elements that must be at the heart of a new contract are:

- Addressing passengers' top priorities for improvement: capacity and frequency, value for money, punctuality and reliability, effective disruption management
- Attention should also be given to personal security and cleanliness on board trains, accurate and timely information and clear and open communication
- The current train fleet is largely ageing and much is in need of refurbishment or renewal. One particular area of concern is the lack of progress towards ensuring the trains comply with requirements for persons with reduced mobility come 2020, by which time all trains are due to be fully compliant
- Transport Focus has long advocated more use of quality-focused targets within a franchise. Our strong preference is for targets based on what passengers think. Central to improving the passenger experience of rail services are effective mechanisms for passenger and stakeholder engagement. The next franchise should provide an engagement strategy that accommodates the needs of different passengers.

2.3 Bus service quality standards

The bus services support grant, together with the Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard lay down core service requirements for funding eligibility, together with enhanced standards of service quality for additional funding.

- It is important for effective delivery for passengers, that implementation and delivery of these standards are reviewed, including how this is measured and achievement

of standards made transparent for passengers, together with expectations for the newly appointed role of Traffic Commissioner for Wales

- Transport Focus recommends developing services in a way which focuses particularly on the aspects of service that drive passenger satisfaction and ensuring these aspects are incorporated into the standards
- This provision should be benchmarked against comparator services through regular survey of bus passenger satisfaction in Wales and understanding of passengers' priorities for improvement
- Quality provision should also heed service levels and the impact of service reductions on passengers' quality of life. Passengers need to be assured of the security of funding; firstly to retain services, then to improve them. Also to support connectivity and passenger trust in the ability to make journeys *and return again*
- We welcome the commitment in the National Transport Finance Plan 2015 to provide funding to support socially necessary services. However, how and where this funding is to be applied will be crucial for passengers, who view buses as providing a vital local service which fulfils many day-to-day travel needs.

2.4 Transport integration and co-ordination

Following the Enterprise and Business Committee's inquiry into Transport Integration in 2013, it will be important to review that implementation of measures and recommendations are delivering improvements for passengers.

- One of the key barriers to encouraging more journeys is the ability to reach destinations by public transport and particularly by bus
- Passengers value the concept of a network and a seamless delivery of service. They want interaction and connectivity, with good standards of information to 'hold their hand' and give them confidence in the ability to make joined-up journeys; together with a well-designed and enabling ticketing system
- This applies to the whole door-to-door journey. The way passengers access services can affect both overall journey cost and time. For example, if getting to the rail station becomes too inconvenient passengers will often choose to make their whole journey by car; adding congestion to the roads and to transport's carbon footprint
- Transport co-ordination was previously channelled through regional consortia, but since restructuring in 2014 responsibility for buses has sat with 22 local authorities, whilst rail is dealt with centrally. Following the Williams Commission, work has continued to reform local government. However for service integration to be effective across Wales, mechanisms must be in place to ensure bodies maintain ongoing liaison and there are decision making processes for cross-boundary and cross-border services, for passengers' local needs to be served.

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